

Valley Center Design Review Board

Approved Minutes: Oct. 11th, 2011

DRB Members present: Robertson, Montgomery, Moore, Herr, Splane

Visitors: Chris Brown, John Andrews, Chris Purvis, Will Rogers, Gary Wynn, Brandon Strausbaugh, Barni Strausbaugh

4:00 PM Lael Montgomery opened the meeting.

Agenda #1: There were no speakers for Public Forum.

Agenda #4: Minutes from August 23, 2011 were unanimously approved with no changes.

Agenda #2: Projects

1. **SolOrchard- Major Use Permit P-11-027**
15155 Vesper Road, Valley Center: 54-acre solar farm (between Vesper & Valley Center Roads)
(project description and site plan attached)

SolOrchard: Will Pritchard
RBF, Landscape Architects: John Andrew
Alchemy Consulting Group: Chris Brown

Will Pritchard and John Andrew presented the site and landscaping plans. They said: The solar farm will be situated on a 54-acre property purchased by SolOrchard on the south side of Vesper Rd. which extends south to Valley Center Rd. The major use permit would re-designate the use of this property from estate residential to civic. Surrounding properties are estate residential. Of the 54 acres, 43 acres will be covered by rows of moving solar panels 150 feet long. Rows are 22 feet apart when angled, and 15-feet apart when flat. This array will provide 7.5 Mega watts of solar generated electric power, about 40% of VC's current use, to S.D. Gas & Electric under a 25 year contract. A decommission plan to governs the removal of the equipment after 25 years.

No grading will be required as the solar farm's panels will follow the contours of the land. 5 x 8 "H" beams will be driven into the ground to support the self tracking panels, so concrete will not be employed in their installation. Concrete pads will however be used as bases for the centrally located electric inverters. (Noise issues from the inverters were discussed, but the DRB was informed that they create no more than 55D.B. at a distance of 50'.) No permanent buildings will be built, or demolished. . The existing home on the property will be renovated and retained. The site slopes from 1413 feet elevation at VC Road up to 1450 feet elevation at Vesper, a distance of approximately 2500 feet.

John Andrews described the landscaping plan for the site. Andrews said that setbacks have been established along Vesper Road to the north and Valley Center Road to the south. There is a 24-foot DG fire road around the perimeter of the property that also serves as a setback to help buffer the solar installation from adjacent properties on the east and west. Fire roads, also used for servicing equipment, run east-west through the installation. The entire property is fenced in chain link (the plans we reviewed show a 6-foot chain link fence with an additional foot for 3-strands of barbed wire.) No large oaks are to be removed, and where there are still living citrus trees to the north, two rows of trees will be maintained as a screen along Vesper Road. To the south, oak trees will screen the site from VC Road. Along the east and west perimeters chain link will be planted in dense vines as screening.

The applicant has met with the VC Trails Association. VC Trails has requested (to quote from the Motion of their meeting) "a trail of a minimum of 12-15 feet around the perimeter of the project with drought resistant/fire-

retardant landscaping to protect those using the trail and prevent the neighbors from seeing the project. Furthermore, the section along Valley Center Road would be dedicated at present, but not built, until the road is widened. If the pathway/trail could be combined with the mandated 24-foot fire road, that would be an acceptable alternative.” In our Design Review Board meeting the applicant said that they would agree to dedicating the western fire road for public trail use, that this compromise is preferred by the applicant and had been discussed in the meeting with VC Trails.

Will Pritchard said that the traffic impact from the site will be almost nothing.

VC DRB Comments and Recommendations:

The VC Design Review Board recognizes and emphasizes to the Valley Center Planning Group, County staff and County decision makers that this project deserves our particularly careful and thorough attention.

- 1) This Major Use Permit will allow the construction and 25-year operation of a solar power generation facility on property that is and has been designated for Semi-Rural residential development on the County General Plan and the Valley Center Community Plan.
- 2) The property borders the main road through the heart of Valley Center where the community and the County have focused millions of dollars on aesthetic and safety improvements of roadside trails and landscaping that begin to establish a small-town “sense of place”.
- 3) This solar installation is the first of several being proposed for high profile residential areas of Valley Center. As such, the design of this project will not only impact the immediate residential area for years to come, it will also impact the aesthetic appearance of Valley Center’s central artery which sets the tone for all future Village development as well as establishes the “character” of our entire community (VC Road is the gateway to virtually every property in town). Finally, the design of this project will set a critical standard and precedent for all other projects of its type in the community for years to come.
 - 4) Land use decisions especially of this nature are permanent, not temporary despite a decommission plan. They catalyze change around them and their impacts are far-reaching

General Recommendations

1. Board members agreed that SolOrchard should -- *on their own property* -- provide set-backs, fencing and landscaping which more than adequately protects adjacent private residential and agricultural properties and Valley Center and Vesper Roads from noise generated by installation construction, ongoing operations and maintenance, and more than adequately screens the solar installation from the view.

2. There was discussion about the presence of abundant landscaping on adjacent properties, including the citrus orchard to the west and residences to the north and east and the applicant’s position that additional landscaping on their own property would be “redundant.” It is the opinion of the VC Design review Board that adjacent property owners should bear none of the current or future responsibility for screening their properties from the applicant’s commercial venture. The dense screening required by this project should be integral to the project site and landscape design, and not be dependent on citrus orchards or landscaping that belong to others.

Specific Recommendations

Specific recommendations refer to the SolOrchard “Preliminary Landscape Plan” dated October 11, 2011.

This plan shows the applicant’s proposal of five different “typical” boundary conditions. Based upon this edition of the applicant’s proposal for landscape screening, the VC Design Review Board makes the following recommendations.

1. All Conditions

- a) Plant vigorous, hardy, thick-growing vines suitable to this property’s particular microclimate along **ALL chain link /barbed wire fencing**. Combine fast- and slow-growing vines to ensure both quick and thick coverage., as well as visual interest and longevity.
- b) Avoid plant monocultures – vary the palette of trees and vines by adding o the proposed Coastal Live **Oaks and Star Jasmine**. **Coastal Live Oak** is threatened by a pest right now.
- c) Add shrubs to the treescape screening along **Vesper and Valley Center Roads**

- d) Susan Moore will provide more specific suggestions to John Andrew over the next few weeks. These additional comments will be incorporated as an addendum to these Minutes. The applicant agreed that a varied plant palette is preferable.
- e) Protect existing oaks during construction to ensure their survival.

2. Condition A along Vesper Road: **Add vines in variety discussed above to this 7' fence.**

3. Condition B along particular stretches of adjacent private properties to the east and to the west: **Increase fence height to 8-feet to block view of the installation from adjacent private properties. Extend this condition to the borders of all adjacent properties.**

4. Condition C along Valley Center Road: **Add vines in variety discussed above to this 7" fence.**

5. Condition D bordering a private property to the west/north: **Add vines in variety discussed above to this 7' fence.**

6. Condition D1 bordering a private property to the South. **Add vines in variety discussed above to this 7' fence.**

Addendum: Susan Moore's post-meeting comments sent by e-mail to John Andrew

Well, once again we are searching for the perfect plants. Always a challenge in our business. The most important thing I have found in Valley Center is the number of micro-climates that are found here. My property is a little less than 4 acres, and I have a minimum of 10 on my property alone. There are several areas that freeze (hard) and several that never see frost. I have found that a plant that thrives in an area will not survive within 5 feet of the original. Soil also varies out here from DG to solid clay in a few feet. Typically, through soil samples and becoming familiar with the micro-climates and soil differences, a landscape can perform very well.

Also, I would suggest varying the plant material quite a bit, so if (when) something fails, the balance of the screening will be unaffected. This would include adding some shrubs with the vines and trees. If the ages of the installed items are varied, the result will be successful. You have a tough requirement to attempt to find plants to maintain a 24" width and over 6' tall. Have you considered coppicing the trees after they reach the desired height in order to control the size?

With that said, I have listed below some of the plants that I have found to be successful, in various areas in Valley Center.

Vines: These are all evergreen and could be combined with Trachelospermum.

Bougainvillea (in areas that don't freeze)

Clytostoma

Distictis

Hardenbergia

Most Jasminiums

Macfadyena

Pandorea

Various types of Oaks do well here, Quercus ilex, Q. agrifolia (susceptible to gold spotted borer), and Q. engelmannii along with Q. suber. Obviously, these trees are slower growing and get very large. And have specialized irrigation requirements.

Might consider:

Ribes

Heteromeles

Cotoneaster species

Acacia species
Melaleuca species
Casuarina species

I look forward to seeing the design. Thanks for the inquiry, John.
Susan

Agenda #3 Discussion of Signage Code Violations on Valley Center Road

1. Signage violations- Montgomery

The chairwoman spoke of the growing problem of signage which doesn't conform to the DRB's guidelines. Gary Wynn and Will Rogers were in attendance to offer support and suggestions. A particularly problematic site, Mr. Lee's property at the west corner of Valley Center and Cole Grade Roads, was discussed. It was feared that the extensive violations this site will encourage other businesses as well to ignore the guidelines for signage, landscaping, and lighting. This property is leased to three businesses, all of them violating the Guidelines. Montgomery discussed the extensive problem with Pam Elias in County Code Enforcement. Ms. Elias recommends that the DRB establish a list of priority violators, submitting the most egregious offenders immediately to the County. The Board agreed that the Lee property is the highest priority. Montgomery has phoned Jerry Gaughan and Frank Shoemaker asking for their voluntary compliance. Gaughan will remove his illegal sign by the end of October. Montgomery will submit an article to the Roadrunner Newspaper to highlight the problem and remind the public of the particulars of the guidelines, particularly for signage. Will Rogers will write a side article about designing signage to complement your business. In addition to the article it was decided that Montgomery will send letters including the article to the other offending business owners with the hope that they will bring their properties into accord without involving County Code Enforcement.

2. Pauma Valley Insurance Signage- Barni & Brandon Strausbaugh

Although formal review of this signage proposal was not on the agenda for today, signage was also the subject of for the Pauma Valley Insurance Company. The owner and his son (Barni & Brandon Strausbaugh, respectively) asked the DRB to preview a rendered elevation of new signage for their business on Valley Center Rd. Checking against the Guidelines the signage was found to have two major problems. The first was that the structure exceeded size & height limitations and the second was that the graphics were cluttered and were designed like that of a multi-business sign.

Montgomery explained to the father and son possible ways to deal with the size and graphics issues. Splane showed the owners how they might change the structure and design of the sign to that of a double pole sign, which would allow them to gain some of the height they desired.

Montgomery adjourned the meeting by consensus at 6:10PM.